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**Author:** Jørgen Veisland

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**Keywords:** Being; time; it gives (es gibt); recognition; concealment

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**Correspondence:** Jørgen Veisland, e: [jorgen.veisland@ug.edu.pl](mailto:jorgen.veisland@ug.edu.pl).

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# Recognition and concealment: Heidegger's 'it gives' in modern poetics

Jørgen Veisland<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

In his essay "On Time and Being" (1972; "Zur Sache des Denkens", 1969) Martin Heidegger states that "Being is determined by time as presence" and then proceeds to analyze the relation between time and Being, ending his argument by calling that relation *Ereignis*, appropriation and event. Appropriation is a process of unconcealment that, paradoxically, yet conceals itself. Being is indeterminate and this indeterminacy is explored in Søren Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition*, in Paul Auster's *Portrait of an Invisible Man*, Samuel Beckett's *Molloy* and *The Unnamable*, Wallace Stevens' poem "The Snow Man", and Kirsten Thorup's novel *Indtil vanvid, indtil døden*. The indeterminacy of Being is valorized as a positive difference existing concurrently in ontology and aesthetics. Poetry grasps this positive difference.

**Keywords:** Being; time; it gives (es gibt); recognition; concealment

## 'It gives': Heidegger's gift in "On Time and Being"

Martin Heidegger's essay "On Time and Being" is to be commended for its epistemological honesty. The honesty demonstrated in the essay consists in its refusal to define the undefinable, in casu the word 'It.' The argument leading up to the conception of the inconceivable culminates in the following statement: "The 'It' of which we speak when we say 'It gives Being,' 'It gives time,' presumably indicates something distinctive which we shall not discuss here."<sup>2</sup> Continuing the argument Heidegger points to the grammar of the subject, saying "that about which a statement is made appears

as the subject: *hypokeimenon* – that which already lies before us, which is present in some way."<sup>3</sup> Heidegger goes on to clarify that what is "predicated of the subject appears as what is already present along with the present subject, the *symbebekos, accidens*: "The auditorium is illuminated."<sup>4</sup> The conclusion follows: "In the 'It' of 'It gives' speaks a presence of something that is present, that is, there speaks, in a way, a Being"; and: "The It, at least in the interpretation available to us for the moment, names a *presence of absence*."<sup>5</sup>

Leading up to the epistemological (and logical) naming of It as a presence of absence Heidegger elucidates the relation between time and Being: "Being is not a thing, thus nothing

<sup>1</sup>University of Gdańsk.

<sup>2</sup>Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, 18.

<sup>3</sup>*Loc. cit.*

<sup>4</sup>*Loc. cit.*

<sup>5</sup>*Loc. cit.*; my emphasis.

temporal, and yet it is determined by time as presence.”<sup>6</sup> The reciprocity of time and Being is elaborated in the following: “It gives Being and how there is, It gives time. In this giving it becomes apparent how that giving is to be determined which, as a relation, first holds the two toward each other and brings them into being.”<sup>7</sup> Heidegger insists on the gift implied in ‘It gives’, taking the German *es gibt* whose everyday meaning is simply ‘there is’ in its literal sense in an attempt to understand the exact nature of the gift. The gift is interpreted, now, as unconcealing: “It gives Being as the unconcealing; as the gift of unconcealing it is retained in the giving. Being *is* not. There is, It gives Being as the unconcealing of presencing.”<sup>8</sup> The ‘unconcealing of presencing’ is contradicted in Heidegger’s discussion of the Greek *epoche*, meaning to hold back. Now both the sending and “the It which sends forth” hold back “with their self-manifestation.”<sup>9</sup> Time is imbued with a fundamental lack, in spite of the fact that when we speak of time we speak of a succession of nows. This pinpointing of time as nows seems futile; as Heidegger argues: “the present in the sense of presence differs so vastly from the present in the sense of the now that the present as presence can in no way be determined in terms of the present as the now.”<sup>10</sup>

Proposing to solve the predicament of *epoche* Heidegger now proceeds to invoke time-space as “the openness which opens up in the mutual self-extending of futural approach, past and present. This openness exclusively and primarily provides the space in which space we usually know it can unfold.”<sup>11</sup> A fourth dimension is added to time: “the unity of time’s three dimen-

sions consists in the interplay of each toward each.”<sup>12</sup> This interplay is time’s fourth dimension. The physical-epistemological conception of time-space allows Heidegger to name *Ereignis* as the co-existence of time and Being, Being coming into itself in the event. But ‘event’ is not simply an occurrence; it is that which makes the occurrence possible. The ‘and’ in the phrase ‘Being and time’ indicates a relation and this relation is indeterminate. Or rather, it is present as a paradox:

The matter at stake first appropriates Being and time into their own in virtue of their relation, and does so by the appropriating that is concealed in destiny and in the gift of opening out. Accordingly, the It that gives in “It gives Being,” “It gives time,” proves to be Appropriation. The statement is correct and yet also untrue: it conceals the matter at stake from us; for, un-awares, we have represented it as some present being, whereas in fact we are trying to think presence as such.<sup>13</sup>

In other words, Being is a species of Appropriation. The opposite is not possible. The case amounts to this, even “the gift of presence is the property of Appropriating. Being vanishes in Appropriation.”<sup>14</sup> The conclusion follows:

Because Being and time are there only in Appropriating, Appropriating has the peculiar property

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

of bringing man into his own as the being who perceives Being by standing within true time. Thus Appropriated, man belongs to Appropriation.<sup>15</sup>

Heidegger's gift to epistemology is the honest presentation of the elusive nature of Appropriation which hinges upon the indeterminate concept of 'It', named a presence of absence. I will propose an approximate determination of 'It': 'a presence of absence' may be determined as negativity understood as pure potentiality generating a possible Being, or possible Beings, and possible forms. The openness and, in a sense, the absence or emptiness of potentiality creates Being and form. It is tempting, perhaps even necessary, to speculate on a few possible manifestations of this presence of absence and this 'It' in thought and in poetics. Such a speculative exercise may serve to supplement Heidegger's essay.

### **'It' and the instincts (drives): Aristotle, Freud and Kristeva**

In his *Poetics* Aristotle talks about two causes lying deep in human nature, the first cause being the instinct of imitation: "the instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, one difference between him and other animals that he is the most imitative of living creatures, and through imitation learns his earliest lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated."<sup>16</sup> We may infer the following from the philosopher's statement: Imitation is an 'instinct' and it is 'implanted'; what an instinct is, precisely, and who or what is the agent of the implanting is not explained. It stands out as an *a priori*. Imitation is closely related to knowledge for it is through imitation that man learns his first lessons. The relation between imitation

and knowledge, or 'lesson', may be described as follows: imitation means the imitating of something that exists prior to the imitating – knowledge, the lesson. Imitation is, then, secondary. The discovery of knowledge through imitation is a source of pleasure. Aesthetics and epistemology are linked. The relation between them is, moreover, 'universal', which indicates that a something, an 'It' perhaps, is universally present as the absent cause of knowledge, poetry and art, and the joy arising from learning and from imitation itself. Yet imitation, miming, emerges as a secondary, even accidental product of a primary universal that is not defined but left standing as an unspecified and unconceived entity.

Aristotle now goes on to name the next instinct common to human nature: "Next, there is the instinct for "harmony" and rhythm, meters being manifestly sections of rhythm. Persons, therefore, starting with this natural gift developed by degrees their special aptitudes, till their rude improvisations gave birth to Poetry."<sup>17</sup> The 'natural gift' is universally present and emanates from 'the instinct' that, once again, is not defined. But since the instinct gives birth to knowledge and poetry, we may infer that the two instincts give birth to what is uniquely human. *Being* expresses itself and becomes manifest through knowledge and poetry, form and harmony, so Being is a product of these manifestations and expressions; however, Being is nothing in itself, or, as Heidegger puts it, Being *is* not. Being is derivative: it is derived from the two instincts that are somehow 'implanted' by an unnamed source, the 'It' as negativity and potentiality.

Sigmund Freud's 'das Es', the Id, is the locus of the drives. 'Drive', 'Trieb' in the original, is a psychic energy which I understand as being neutral initially but inscribed with structure as it moves through the body. The structur-

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 55.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

ing of the drives are instigated by the primary processes that produce displacement and condensation, thus contributing to the constitution of the subject. Julia Kristeva's discussion of the semiotic *chora* elucidates this process in *Revolution in Poetic Language* by defining 'semiotic' as a "distinctive mark, trace, index, precursory sign, proof, engraved or written sign, imprint, trace, figuration."<sup>18</sup> *Chora* is defined as a "mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stages."<sup>19</sup> The 'articulation' becomes less provisional in the order of the Symbolic which follows the order of the Semiotic. However, the semiotic *chora* is an active agent in the process of *mimesis*. Kristeva argues that *mimesis* is the construction of an object, "not according to truth but to *verisimilitude*."<sup>20</sup> Kristeva states that (modern) poetic language subverts grammar, causing the Symbolic to be breached. Poetic *mimesis* dissolves the denotative function, thus disrupting the Symbolic order. This disruption is enhanced in sacrifice and in the practices preceding sacrifice, theater, poetry, song, dance, art. In these practices the subject engages in miming and in the reproduction of signifiers: "By *reproducing signifiers* – vocal, gestural, verbal – the subject crosses the border of the symbolic and reaches the semiotic *chora*, which is on the other side of the social frontier."<sup>21</sup>

Are the drives and the semiotic *chora* the positive emanations and manifestations of a primal negativity and potentiality? They may be understood as such. The miming, both according to Aristotle and Kristeva, is a secondary, derivative process which in Kristeva's view detaches signification from the symbolic, thus causing a break and allowing the semiotic to re-emerge. Imitation, miming, *mimesis*, come

about as the positive manifestations of a latent negativity. *Mimesis* is the presence of an absence. An absent 'It.'

### **'It' and repetition: Kierkegaard, Proust and Auster**

In *Repetition* Constantin Constantius, Kierkegaard's pseudonym for the occasion, conceives of repetition as follows:

- (1) It is in our days not explained how mediation comes about, if it is the result of the movement of the two elements, and in what way it already from the start is contained in these, or if something new is added, and in that case how.
- (2) In this regard the Greek ideas about *kinesis*, which corresponds to the modern category "transition," should be considered seriously.
- (3) The dialectic of transition is easy; because what is repeated, has been, otherwise it could not be repeated, but the fact that it has been, makes repetition into the new.
- (4) When the Greeks said that all knowledge is recollection, then they said that all of existence, which is, has been, when you say that life is a repetition, you say: the existence, that has been, now becomes.
- (5) When you haven't got the category of recollection or repetition, all life dissolves into and empty noise devoid of content.<sup>22</sup>

I want to emphasize the following: Superim-

<sup>18</sup> Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 25.

<sup>19</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>22</sup> Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 149.



posed upon Constantin's conception of *kinesis*, transition, movement, is the concept of the instant, *Øieblikket*, which paradoxically lifts time out of time. Or in other words: Repetition does not exist without the instant. It is, in fact, the elusive presence of the *Øieblik* which generates repetition, i.e. movement in time, while also in the same movement arresting time by positing time outside of time. In this way the eternal interferes with the temporal. The elusive, transitory appearance of the eternal in time occurs literally in a momentary glance, *blik*, the propensity of the human eye to confront naturally, as it were, the instantaneous presence of the eternal and to briefly, in a fraction of a second, the time it takes to wink the eye, shutting and opening it, experience and gain access to the eternal. I explain 'propensity' as the inherent facility in human perception and cognition implanted in the mind by the eternal itself. Thus it is not accidental that Constantin proceeds directly from his analysis of repetition to that of recollection, the source of knowledge. Intellection and cognition, the epistemological faculty of the human mind, are congruous with the brief appearance of the eternal, for it is the eternal that facilitates perception and cognition.

In his discussion in *Mimesis* of Marcel Proust's *Swann's Way* and its relation to the modern narrative Erich Auerbach notes that Proust's technique is "bound up with a recovery of lost realities in remembrance, a recovery released by some externally insignificant and apparently accidental occurrence."<sup>23</sup> The recovery occurs in the taste of a cake, the *petite Madeleine*, which arouses intense delight in the narrator, Marcel, and "from this recovered remembrance, the world of his childhood emerges into light, becomes depictable, as more genuine and more real than any experienced present – and he begins to narrate."<sup>24</sup> The act of narration is, then, preconditioned

upon the 'recovered remembrance', a repetition through recollection that unites experience and aesthetic activity. The recovery is instantaneous and precipitated by the sense of taste, which indicates the affinity of the sensory and the sensual to knowledge and aesthetics. Kierkegaard's glance of the eye, the visual faculty, is supplanted by taste in Marcel's narrative. Vision and taste alike provide access to knowledge and creativity. Vision in Marcel's narrative is, however, almost identical to Constantin's momentary glance or glimpse. Marcel comments that when he sees any external object, his consciousness would come between him and the object, making it incorporeal. The evanescence of truth and reality is posited here and becomes implicit in the narrative. Evanescence is thematized and informs the entire narrative progress, frequently causing a deletion of artistic representation and a failed access to reality.

Paul Auster's *Portrait of an Invisible Man* continues and expands the incorporeal, here augmented to an outright invisibility. Auster's work is a fictional biography of his father, Sam Auster, as an invisible man, living a robot-like life in his house which he uses as a hotel. The invisibility, the absence of the father vis a vis his children, is partly explicable through the immigrant background of the Auster family, a family with no roots and no origin. The father adopts a series of roles, known only to himself, masking himself in a continuous hiding. The roles and faces of the father express an attempt to construct a new identity and this involves creating a new Being, a new ontology and a new metaphysic, an experiment which fails since the Being is founded on absence. A subject-object dialectic emerges in the *Portrait*, made up of narration (subject; son/artist) and object (invisibility; father/businessman). The father exemplifies a gap that absorbs writing

<sup>23</sup> Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 541.

<sup>24</sup> *Loc. cit.*

and involves the narrative act in a predicament. Father and son possess a common insight: Being is always related to something different from itself, an Other. The assumed identities of the businessman and the artist constitute a mockery of Being. The father leaves no traces after death. The irony implicit in the son's narrative consists in the fact that the absence of the father is extended to the existential and aesthetic condition of the narrator. Narrating becomes a guise but it is only through this guise that the truth may be arrived at – truth as the recovery of time lost and as the conversion of invisibility to visibility. The son's narrative constructs a visibility, a presence of absence, tenuous as it may be.

Heidegger's 'It' appears here as the propelling force of repetition and recollection. 'It' becomes a stand-in for the eternal.

### **'It', knowledge and poetry: Samuel Beckett and Wallace Stevens**

In *Fear and Trembling* Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes de Silentio refers to Chapter 11 of Aristotle's *Poetics* where the latter explores the dramatic implications of recognition, stating: "Recognition, as the name indicates, is a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune. The best form of recognition is coincident with a Reversal of the Situation, as in the *Oedipus*."<sup>25</sup> Johannes de Silentio rightly claims that "Where there can be a question of a recognition there is implied *eo ipso* a previous concealment. So just as recognition is the relieving, the relaxing factor in the dramatic life, so is concealment the factor of tension."<sup>26</sup> Johannes adds the following comment:

In Greek tragedy concealment (and consequently recognition) is an epic survival grounded upon a fate in which the dramatic action disappears from view and from which it derives its obscure and enigmatic origin. Hence it is that the effect produced by a Greek tragedy is like the impression of a marble statue which lacks the power of the eye. Greek tragedy is blind.<sup>27</sup>

This observation by Johannes de Silentio constitutes a significant expansion of Aristotle's poetics. While Aristotle focuses on the *dramatis personae* Johannes calls attention to the 'obscure and enigmatic origin' of dramatic action itself. The obscurity and the enigma are grounded upon 'a fate', and this 'fate' is, according to Johannes, bound up with the aesthetics of plot and action, i.e. with form. As I see it, Johannes de Silentio performs an epistemological maneuver that gravitates in a modern or even modernistic direction: the obscure and enigmatic origin is immanent to the form of drama itself and hence may be said to result in a self-reflexivity. The self-reflexive act of recognition is bound to vacillate between knowledge and ignorance. The epistemological project fails, therefore, as it is tied up with a 'fate' implying the impossibility of knowing. This fate is a manifestation of the form and the structure of human cognition – a defective form that invalidates the medium of language as the mediator of knowledge.

Samuel Beckett's novel *Molloy* is the narrative of a self-reflecting and self-reflexive voice obsessed with the problem of knowledge and ignorance and the relation of this problem to language and representation. Molloy says he is not given to presentiments but to sentiments,

<sup>25</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 72.

<sup>26</sup> Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 72.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

or rather to episentiments, for: I knew in advance, which made all presentiments superfluous. I will even go further (what can I lose?), I knew only in advance, for when the time came I knew no longer, you may have noticed it, or only when I made a superhuman effort, and when the time was past I no longer knew either, I regained my ignorance.<sup>28</sup>

Subject to the passing of time Molloy loses the knowledge he possessed 'in advance' because knowledge itself is subject to time and is lost in time. This inevitable loss of knowledge amounts to a *fate* in Johannes de Silentio's sense of the word. There can be no breaking through the continuous, time-bound cycle of knowledge and ignorance. The only way out of the cycle would be to break with language and with the continuous voice that insists on knowing and on trying to fix knowledge in recognizable sentences. The liberation from voice and the lapse into a final silence is demonstrated by Johannes de Silentio's comments on the silence of Abraham:

Abraham keeps silent – but he *cannot* speak. Therein lies the distress and anguish. For if I when I speak am unable to make myself intelligible, then I am not speaking – even though I were to talk uninterruptedly day and night. Such is the case with Abraham. He is able to utter everything, but one thing he cannot say, i.e. say it in such a way that another understands it, and so he is not speaking. The relief of speech is that it translates me into the universal. Now Abraham is able to say the most beautiful things about

how he loves Isaac. But it is not this he has at heart to say, it is the profounder thought that he would sacrifice him because it is a trial.<sup>29</sup>

Johannes concludes that Abraham is neither a tragic nor an aesthetic hero. He stands in "an absolute relation to the absolute"<sup>30</sup> – Beckett's Molloy is an aesthetic hero, speaking without making himself intelligible and therefore stuck in time and in the cycle of knowledge and ignorance. Speaking and silence are explored in Beckett's *The Unnamable* whose voice strains to invoke a third voice, "a darling dream I've been having, a broth of a dream."<sup>31</sup> However, this third voice would only ceaselessly emit more stories: "and tales like this of wombs and cribs, diapers beписsed and the first long trousers, love's young dream and life's old lech, blood and tears and skin and bones and tossing in the grave, and so coax him out, as he me, that's right, pidgin bullskrit."<sup>32</sup> The 'bullskrit' is the product of a futile language, the voice grinding down to a negation of itself and suspended in a longing for silence.

Wallace Stevens poem "The Snow Man" attempts, successfully in my view, a reconciliation of sound and silence by erasing the human voice and listening to the voices of nature, the sound of a few leaves in winter and the sound of the wind "Which is the sound of the land/Full of the same wind/That is blowing in the same bare place."<sup>33</sup> The listener and the poet must have a mind of winter, Stevens says; that is, the subjective and the objective must be fused in order for listening to come about. This fusion is preconditioned upon the giving up of the voices that Beckett's *Unnamable* was straining to attain. Thus poetry becomes knowledge,

<sup>28</sup> Beckett, *Molloy*, 82.

<sup>29</sup> Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 100–101.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>31</sup> Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 378.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 378–379.

<sup>33</sup> Stevens, "The Snow Man," 4<sup>th</sup> stanza.



awareness transcending voice and language, and sensory perception attaining knowledge of 'the same bare place': "For the listnener, who listens in the snow,/And, nothing himself, beholds/Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is."<sup>34</sup> Stevens' poem achieves nothing less than a singular congruity of the ontological and the aesthetic. The 'nothing that is' is free of everything 'that is not there', i.e. free of the impositions of language and identity. Nothing is: Heidegger's 'It' emerges full force in "The Snow Man" as an absent presence.

Stevens claims elsewhere, notably in the essay "The figure of the youth as virile poet" (1942) that truth has an aesthetic dimension: "poetic truth is an agreement with reality, brought about by the imagination of a man disposed to be strongly influenced by his imagination."<sup>35</sup> Elaborating on the nature of poetic truth Stevens adds that the poet lives "in a kind of radiant and productive atmosphere," and here "the philosopher is an alien."<sup>36</sup> The poet experiences "a pleasure of agreement with the radiant and productive world in which he lives."<sup>37</sup> Further, philosophical truth is logical, poetic truth empirical. Stevens states that poetic truth is "a truth of fact," and fact includes "poetic fact" since there are an "indefinite number of actual things that are indistinguishable from objects of the imagination."<sup>38</sup>

The objects of the imagination Stevens calls attention to are located in the field Heidegger refers to as 'It.' The 'It' is a composite of inside and outside to the point where the two cannot be differentiated from one another. 'It' comprises the imagination and reality. 'It' is potentiality, i.e. that which may be actualized. The actualization of the immanent, potential forms of Being is best carried out in the field of

aesthetics, as indeed it is in Kierkegaard's play with multiple pseudonyms whose manifestations constitute a poetic life, in Stevens' sense. The aesthetic dimension of knowledge and the epistemological dimension of aesthetics coexist in a state of mutual interdependency. Stevens and Kierkegaard do not reverse Aristotle's poetics. They amplify it in creating a modern poetics where imitation and the joy of imitation – Stevens' pleasure – aesthetics and sensory perception enhance knowledge and truth.

### 'It' and the individual: Kirsten Thorup

Commenting on faith, the ethical and inwardness, Johannes de Silentio in *Fear and Trembling* states the following:

Faith [...] is the paradox that inwardness is higher than outwardness – or, to recall an expression used above, the uneven number is higher than the even.

In the ethical way of regarding life it is therefore the task of the individual to divest himself of the inward determinants and express them in an outward way. Whenever he shrinks from this, whenever he is inclined to persist in or to slip back again into the inward determinants of feeling, mood, etc., he sins, he is in a temptation.<sup>39</sup>

Johannes now declares: "The paradox of faith is this, that the individual is higher than the universal, that the individual (to recall a dogmatic distinction now rather seldom heard) de-

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 5<sup>th</sup> stanza.

<sup>35</sup> Stevens, "The figure of the youth as virile poet," 54.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>37</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>39</sup> Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 59.

termines his relation to the universal by his relation to the absolute, not his relation to the absolute by his relation to the universal.”<sup>40</sup> The ethical implications of this conception of the individual are significant. It follows logically from Johannes’ statement that the individual *per* standing in a relation to the absolute possesses a higher ethical vantage-point and is able to engage in concrete actions which involve him in ethical relationships with others. Truly ethical relations would not be possible if the individual were to give in to the ‘inward determinants of feeling,’ or if he would act in accordance with the moral conventions of ‘the universal.’ Individual or subjective ethics transcend normative ethics.

In “On Time and Being” Heidegger elaborates on the term Appropriation, saying that:

as we think of Being itself and follow what is its own, Being proves to be destiny’s gift of presence, the gift granted by the giving of time. The gift of presence is the property of Appropriating. Being vanishes in Appropriation. In the phrase “Being as Appropriation,” the word “as” now means: Being, letting presence sent in Appropriating. Time extended in Appropriating.<sup>41</sup>

Heidegger follows this up by concluding that since “Being and time are there only in Appropriating” it follows that Appropriating brings man “into his own as the being who perceives Being by standing within true time.”<sup>42</sup> The pivotal phrase here is ‘true time.’ Translated into Kierkegaard’s, or rather, Johannes de Silentio’s terms, true time is the moment when the individual posits himself in relation to the absolute, thus enabling himself to engage in

ethical relations. Johannes’ individual is *appropriated by and in the absolute*. Heidegger’s ‘It’, concealed and withheld as immanent potential, becomes manifest in the individual.

The protagonist/narrator of Kirsten Thorup’s novel *Indtil vanvid, indtil døden* (Unto Madness, Unto Death, 2020), Harriet, is a young Danish woman whose husband enlisted in the Nazi German air force and was killed in battle during the Finnish-Russian war. In October 1942 Harriet decides to visit a Danish friend, Gudrun, who is married to Klaus Franke, a Nazi officer. The couple resides in Munich. Here Harriet witnesses the implosion of Nazism, a psychological, moral and economic dissolution that confirms her opinion that the Nazis, including her own husband, have envisioned and attempted to realize an impossible Utopia founded on the ideological conviction that the individual must be incorporated in the state and must succumb to mass indoctrination. The elimination of individuality is a precondition for constructing the future state whose power resides in the freezing of time: a millennium conceived as an eternity. This Utopian vision starts degenerating at the time of Harriet’s visit to Munich. A Dystopia manifests itself as the immanent inversion of the Utopian ideal, always threatening to break through to the surface because of the contradictions inherent in Utopia itself.

Harriet is not only an observer. As narrator she is the agent of individual, subjective difference that challenges the Nazi hegemony. She is not only part of the action of the narrative. She instigates it by inserting her own individual perspective, a naturally ethical perspective that leads to compassionate actions in her defence of and aid to the oppressed, the *Ostarbeiter* from Ukraine and Poland that perform slave labor in the households of the Nazi elite. Like Johannes de Silentio’s individual she transcends ‘the uni-

<sup>40</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>41</sup> Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, 21–22.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

versal', and embraces a higher ethic. She is not alone in this. The Nazi system is breaking up from within as the local economy is failing due to the massive expenditure required at the Eastern front where the battle of Stalingrad is going on. Nazi officers and their wives, members of the Munich upper class, are becoming demoralized and their faith in the system is showing cracks. Gudrun exhibits serious mental problems and is alcoholized. Her son is being taken care of by the Ludmillas, so-called, forced laborers from the Ukraine employed in the Franke household. Moreover, the Nazi regime is being challenged from within by the so-called Edelweiss group, a band of young dissidents that distribute anti-Nazi information and paint the slogan FREEDOM on the city walls.

Harriet's strong individuality and her difference from others has been apparent from her early youth. In Denmark she attended a famous sports folk high school, Ollerup, where discipline and conformity was an integral part of the sports curriculum. Harriet stood apart from the other students because of her looks:

Because of my looks I did not belong to the chosen ones. The blond and the blue-eyed (also in the metaphorical sense) were the preferred ones. For aesthetic reasons, in consideration of "the ornament of the mass." Formations and the geometrical figures had to have a cool Nordic look, just like the light ice-blue gym suits. I understood the aesthetic argument. But being disqualified because of inborn characteristics meant being reduced to a lower caste and being stamped by fate as a deviant person with the wrong looks and physical make-up. The great disappoint-

ment that students less qualified than myself were selected led to my rebellion, not against Daddy's visions for the future but against himself and his pedagogical practice.<sup>43</sup>

'Daddy' is principal Bukh of Ollerup, a crypto-Nazi whose presence early on in the narrative indicates the omnipresent danger of societal regimentation and conformity. In her conversations with Gudrun in Munich Harriet emphasizes her individuality: "I am not on anyone's side. Not part of an "us." I am independent. A freebooter. Must choose my words more carefully. For Gudrun "us" is her natural element. A manifestation of German superiority. The racial cult."<sup>44</sup>

At a dinner party that turns into an orgy one of the Ludmillas (the name given to all Ukrainian women workers apparently) is raped by Klaus and other officers and dies subsequently of internal bleeding. This atrocity makes Harriet desperate and she starts making preparations for the return train ride home. During her three-month stay in Munich she has managed to disclose the demise and the utter moral and social dissolution of Nazism. She has accomplished this by witnessing and portraying, through a kind of internal monologue, the fall of Nazism. She depicts this fall from within. Johannes de Silentio's 'inwardness' informs the aesthetics and the rhetoric of the narrative as well as the ethics of the narrator.

## Conclusion

Having presented a number of 'imitations' of Heidegger's 'It' I may conclude by noting that the potential openness of 'It' and of the time-space continuum, which brings about Appropriation, is qualified by a recognition-

<sup>43</sup> Thorup, *Indtil vanvid, indtil døden*, 19. English translations are mine.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

concealment dialectic. Concealing, holding back, *epoch*, may entail epistemological difficulties with dire implications. The ultimate end of ‘It’ in my view is the proper, i.e. its own appropriate manifestation in the individual absolute as Johannes de Silentio conceives of it. But ‘It’ may appear in a number of false imitations, a delinquent mimesis that betrays its own origin. In times of social and cultural dissolution such false imitations will abound. To counteract them the mind must be alert enough to resist the conformity and the hegemony that result from distortions of ‘It.’

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**Correspondence:** Jørgen Veisland, e: [jorgen.veisland@ug.edu.pl](mailto:jorgen.veisland@ug.edu.pl).

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